



WORKFORCE PARTICIPATION IN INDIA- GENDER INCLUSIVE OR EXCLUSIVE?

*Dr. Ankita Gupta¹ | Satyendra Pratap Singh²

¹Associate Professor, Department of Economics, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, India.

²Research Scholar in Economics Department, Mahatma Gandhi Kashi Vidyapith, Varanasi, India.

ABSTRACT

While women form half of India's population constituting 48.1% of the population, their participation in the labor market is almost one-third as well as declining. Improving socio-economic conditions so as to ensure better outcomes, alignment with Millennium Development Goals. Therefore, enhancing women participation in the labor force is a critical endeavor for driving overall social-economic and sustainable development.

Women are a very important human capital who has enriched the society with their contribution in almost every field, in every century. The principal cause for the declining WLFPR relates to stage of development, which suggests a U-shaped relationship between economic development and WLFPR where WLFPR first declines and then rises. While the data on female work participation rate shows a steep decline, the reality remains that women work, in the house as well as outside the house. The inability of data to capture various facets of a woman's work as 'work' has led to complete failure of policies in acknowledging her as a 'worker' and unable to recognize her entitlement to equal wages, better work conditions and social security.

KEYWORDS: Workforce participation, Women employment, Women labour. Indian women.

INTRODUCTION:

Importance of Women Workforce Participation:

Women's labour is a rich and important resource for a country as it can significantly boost growth prospects. It is seen that for most women, the domestic care work e.g. home and child remains the centre of all work-related decisions that they ever make. Their strategies however, differ from situation to situation. They choose work which is near their home or inside their home, part-time and therefore also low wage; and in cases where the woman takes on full time work, it is seen that she chooses work places which give her the flexibility to bring her child to work. However, irrespective of the sector she chooses to work, challenges that a woman informal worker has to face are many.

A recent film developed by the Institute of Social Studies Trust (ISST) on the situation of informal women workers of Delhi highlights those women informal workers have to deal with numerous challenges at the workplace. These include difficulty at all levels – finding consistent work, untimely and ad hoc payment of wages, unhygienic, hazardous working conditions, lack of appropriate tools and basic facilities, inability to take leave, wage cuts and harassment and abuse. Their need to constantly give time to their care and domestic work responsibilities complicates their situation.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

Chaudhary and Verick (2014) estimate that absolute increase in female employment between 1994 and 2010 largely took place in low growth sectors, such as agriculture, and handicrafts, marked by low productivity and wages. Further, they posit that if women had access to the same work opportunities as men, the absolute increase female employment would have been up to three times higher during this period.

Kapsos (2014) found that less than 19 per cent of the new employment opportunities generated in India's 10 fastest growing occupations were taken up by women. Despite increases in primary and secondary educations, women have systematically lost out on opportunities in fast growing sectors owing to an increasing demand for technically skilled labor, and men having higher tertiary educational and vocational training levels.

India's remarkably low levels of women's work participation are well recognized (Dasgupta and Verick 2017); Rising household incomes and rising levels of education tend to reduce supply of labour (Mehrotra and Parida 2017).

It has been suggested that rising education may explain some of the decline in women's labour force participation (Rangarajan et al. 2011).

As young women continue to pursue education, demands on their time may make it difficult for them to continue to participate in the workforce. This is a plausible explanation for decline in WPRs for young women especially rural areas.

Changes in labour markets have pushed women out of agricultural jobs, and other opportunities have failed to materialize, reducing demands for women's labour (Klasen and Pieters 2015)

Females in households with higher per capita spending are less likely to be in the labor force (Das S, Jain-Chandra S, Kochhar K, and Kumar N 2015).

Much of the progress achieved over the past couple of decades in developed countries can be attributed to the fact that women and men in these countries have near equal educational achievements and women face less restrictive social norms regarding paid work (ILO, 2017a).

Public policies also play an important role. For instance, family support policies, which aim to improve work-life balance, rights to paid leave and return to equivalent work, as well as affordable childcare services for working parents, are known to have made a substantial contribution to lifting the participation rates of women, and especially those of mothers, in these countries (ILO, 2016b; Thévenon, 2013; Vuri, 2016).

Evidence of persistent gender pay gaps in many developed countries highlights ongoing problems of gender gaps in job quality despite women's increasing labour market presence. Because women have significantly improved levels of human capital (e.g. education and experience), which have even overtaken those of men in several developed countries, new research is pointing to other factors that can explain the enduring wage penalty faced by women, such as employers' discriminatory hiring and promotion practices, for example (Grimshaw and Rubery, 2015).

It could also be because the household incomes have risen in rural areas on account of higher wage levels which is dragging women out of the labour market (Himanshu, 2011)

DISCUSSION:

Women Labor force Participation in India:

As per the latest NSSO PLFS survey, the state of WLFPR has worsened and only 17.5 percent of women are part of the labour force, compared to 55.5 percent of men. In an attempt to address this, the government has actively pursued policies to increase the FLWP rate for several decades. The principal cause for the declining WLFPR relates to stage of development, which suggests a U-shaped relationship between economic development and WLFPR where WLFPR first declines and then rises.

While India seems to exhibit the downward trend of the U-curve, its upward trend is yet to be seen. Simply, there is a lack of jobs that match the skills and ambitions of educated women. Worryingly, the combined participation rates (labour market and/or educational participation) still include only 55-60 % of young working age women.

Table-1 presents LFPRs in rural and urban areas based on different approaches.

Table-1

Statement 10: WPR (in per cent) in usual status (ps+ss) during 1972-73 (27 th round) and PLFS (2017-18)									
round (year)	all-India								
	usually (ps+ss) employed								
	rural			urban			all		
	male	female	person	male	female	person	male	female	person
PLFS (2017-18)	51.7	17.5	35.0	53.0	14.2	33.9	52.1	16.5	34.7
68 th (2011-12)	54.3	24.8	39.9	54.6	14.7	35.5	54.4	21.9	38.6
66 th (2009-10)	54.7	26.1	40.8	54.3	13.8	35.0	54.6	22.8	39.2
61 st (2004-05)	54.6	32.7	43.9	54.9	16.6	36.5	54.7	28.7	42.0
55 th (1999-00)	53.1	29.9	41.7	51.8	13.9	33.7	52.7	25.9	39.7
50 th (1993-94)	55.3	32.8	44.4	52.1	15.5	34.7	54.5	28.6	42.0
43 rd (1987-88)	53.9	32.3	43.4	50.6	15.2	33.7	53.1	28.5	41.2
38 th (1983)	54.7	34.0	44.5	51.2	15.1	34.0	53.8	29.6	42.0
32 nd (1977-78)	55.2	33.1	44.4	50.8	15.6	34.1	54.3	29.7	42.3
27 th (1972-73)	54.5	31.8	*	50.1	13.4	*	*	*	*

Note: *: proportions not derived for NSS 27th round

1. The figures are to be read along with the explanatory note for comparability.

Analysis of NSSO data (1970 – 2018) shows that women have largely been undertaking labor-intensive, home-based, and informal work, concentrated in low-productivity sectors (figures 2 and 3). The proportion of rural women working in agriculture fell from 88.1% in 1977-78 to 73.2% in 2017-18, even as the corresponding decline for rural men was 80.6% to 55% over the same period. For urban women, the service sector has become increasingly significant, with its share in employment rising from 35.7% in 1977-78 to 60.7% in 2017-18. In this sector, women have become concentrated in professions such as teaching and nursing, which offer only limited scope for career progression. Unlike men, neither urban nor rural woman could significantly increase their presence in the secondary sector.

Labour Force Participation Rates (LFPR) in different approaches. The labour force participation rate (LFPR) is defined as the percentage of persons in the labour force among the persons in the population. In Statement 7, the LFPRs for persons of all ages at the all-India level based on usual status (ps+ss) and current weekly status obtained from PLFS (2017-18) are presented along with the corresponding rates obtained from the quinquennial employment and unemployment surveys of NSSO conducted during NSS 50th (1993-94), 55th (1999-2000), 61st (2004-2005), 66th (2009-10) and 68th (2011-12) rounds.

Table-2: Females who attend to domestic duties as a percentage of all females in India (UPSS)

Various years	Rural females	Urban females
1993-94	29.1	41.7
1999-2000	29.2	43.3
2004-05	27.2	42.8
2009-10	34.7	46.5
2011-12	35.3	46.1

Source: NSS, various rounds.

In India, the low female labor force participation rate is perhaps due to a substantially high proportion of females reporting their activity status as attending to domestic duties. In 2011-12, 35.3 per cent of all rural females and 46.1 per cent of all urban females in India were attending to domestic duties (table 2). Majority of women in India work and contribute to the economy in one form or another, much of their work is not documented or accounted for in official statistics. Women's role in reproduction and, within households, such as caring for the young and old, cooking and other household chores, do not find recognition in the system of national accounts or other economic statistics.

CONCLUSION:

The focus of this discussion has been to understand the continuing problem of low FLWP for women in India despite massive investments in employment and skill-building initiatives.

This analysis reveals that it is not so much the policies that provide employment as ones that facilitate employments, which are the need of the hour. National data on labour force participation rates may not be comparable owing to differences in concepts and methodologies. The single most important factor affecting data comparability is the data source. Labour force data obtained from population censuses are often based on a restricted number of questions on the economic characteristics of individuals, with little possibility of probing. The resulting data, therefore, are generally not consistent with corresponding labour force survey data and may vary considerably from one country to another, depending on the number and type of questions included in the census.

Low budgetary allocation to support of services, such as travel, lodging and child-care and their safety suggest that the current policy mix is incognizant of

the grass-root realities faced by women. Effort, therefore, is needed to amplify the gender-sensitivity of program. This can be achieved for a policy by enhancing its quotient of program components that cater to women's all-round needs.

Women continue to encounter challenges when it comes to advancing in the workplace and in many facets of society. The apparently declining WPR for rural women has set up a ferocious debate regarding whether this is due to rising prosperity that leads to women's labor force withdrawal or jobless growth that has pushed women out of labor force.

- Social status and women's labor force participation have a complex relationship. Withdrawal from wage labor where women may face conditions exposing them to potential abuse
- A further underlying aspect that contributes to financial disparities and economic participation between women and men worldwide is-
- The disproportionate burden of household and care responsibilities that women continue to carry compared to men almost everywhere.
- In no country in the world is the amount of time spent by men on unpaid work (mainly domestic and volunteer work) equal to that of women- (The Global Gender Gap Report 2020)
- Flexibility in Working Hours and adequate care taking agency will help foster the WLFPR both for rural and urban women.
- Decent working conditions and safety in workplace
- More active women grievance cell and timely redressal of complaints
- You should choose for yourself rather than your gender making choice for you

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